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# THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ETHICS

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## FRIEDRICH PAULSEN'S ETHICAL WORK AND INFLUENCE.

FRANK THILLY.

AMONG contemporary teachers of philosophy in Germany none exercised a more wholesome ethical influence within his sphere than Professor Friedrich Paulsen, who died at his home in Steglitz, Berlin, at the beginning of the summer vacation. His interest in human conduct and affairs grew with his advancing years, and instead of withdrawing into the solitude of the closet, as the thinker is often tempted to do, he felt the call to appeal to a wider circle of his fellows through the spoken and written word. And so it happened that the philosopher did not "retire under the shelter of a wall," but gave free and full expression to his views on practical subjects and did all he could to set his people right in matters of the heart as well as of the head. Nothing can be more helpful to a nation than to receive instruction from a teacher of ripe experience and keen theoretical insight, who has devoted himself to the contemplation of life and its problems and who is ready and eager to share his rich store of wisdom with the social group of which he forms a loyal member. It is an encouraging sign that in a country like Germany, where specialistic scholarship has been so highly developed, university professors are coming into sympathetic touch with the larger public outside of the academic halls and are contributing their

share in solving questions of vital interest to humanity. Among these Paulsen became a leading figure during the last ten years of his life. As his friend and colleague Professor Kaftan said of him in his funeral sermon: "Whenever a question became a burning issue, a word was expected from him to help clear the air. Thus he came to be a faithful Eckardt to his people, one of those who time and again contributed to the awakening of the public conscience." How well he performed the service is eloquently attested by a long list of addresses and essays which were called forth at various times and published in the popular press. As some of the best things produced by him in this field may be mentioned: "Ernst Haeckel as a Philosopher,"<sup>1</sup> "Politics and Morality," "Party Politics and Morality," "The Monarchy and the Parties," "The Decline of Parliamentarism," "Germany and England," "The Ethics of Jesus and Its Relation to the Present,"<sup>2</sup> and the series of essays published in book form shortly before his death, under the title, "Modern Education and Sexual Morality."<sup>3</sup>

Paulsen was not an orator in the ordinary sense of the term, but he possessed the eloquence of earnestness, sincerity and reason. He had the power of convincing the seriously minded through temperate and rational thinking, and his words were received with respectful attention by those who heard and read. In a land in which paradoxical and neurotic utterances are not entirely unknown and in which the mania for originality sometimes

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<sup>1</sup> Published in Paulsen's book, "Philosophia Militans," a series of essays against clericalism and naturalism.

<sup>2</sup> These six essays are to be found in "Gesammelte Reden und Aufsätze." The address on "Party Politics and Morality" was reviewed in this JOURNAL, October, 1901.

<sup>3</sup> An account of these essays will be found in the *Educational Review*, December, 1908. A collection of essays, "Richtlinien der jüngsten Bewegung im höheren Schulwesen Deutschlands," discussing the school reforms inaugurated in Germany since 1901, has just been issued from the press in book form. It was completed a few weeks before the author's death.

issues in peculiar forms of sensationalism, a man of sanity and balance, whose heart was in the right place, and whose ideals were sound, could not help finding work to do, and it is not surprising that Friedrich Paulsen, the descendant of the weather-beaten seamen of the North, came to lead many a battle against perverse theory and perverse practice. Those who attended his classes will remember how gratefully the students of the university which he served received his help in sifting the true from the false, how he strengthened their idealism and inspired in them a rational respect for clean and upright living; and they will remember too how all this was done without any effort on his part to preach morality, but followed naturally from a calm and truthful consideration of the problem. He did not plead, he did not exhort, he did not scold; he reasoned simply and honestly, and found his way into the hearts of his hearers through their intelligence; and before they knew it he had set up for them in a new form the very ideals which in their "enlightenment" they had come to regard as unbecoming to full-grown men. He lived up to the spirit of the passage from Marcus Aurelius which he adopted as the motto of the second book of his *Ethics*: "If any man is able to convince me that I do not think or act right, I will gladly change; for I seek the truth, by which no man was ever injured. But he is injured who abides in his error and ignorance." And another motto, too, which he took from Lao-tse, was characteristic of him: "I possess three treasures: these I guard and prize highly. The first is the love of humanity; the second, frugality; the third, that I do not presume to be better than anyone else."

How thoroughly Paulsen was interested in ethical problems may be seen from the fact that his first work, his doctor's dissertation, which was written in Latin and published in the year 1871, offered "*Historical-Critical Contributions to the Moral-Philosophical Systems*," and that he was one of the very few German professors of

philosophy who gave a special course of lectures on ethics at the university. His large manual, entitled "System of Ethics, Including an Outline of the Theory of the State and Society," first appeared in 1889 and has since passed through nine editions. Other books possessing an interest for the student of ethics are his "Introduction to Philosophy," which is in its nineteenth edition; his "Schopenhauer, Hamlet and Mephistopheles: A Study in Pessimism"; his "Immanuel Kant"; his "Collected Addresses and Essays"; his "German Universities"; his "German Education";<sup>4</sup> his "Modern Education"; and his paper on "Ethics" in the sixth volume of *Kultur der Gegenwart*, which was reviewed in the last (October) number of the INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ETHICS.

The "System of Ethics" is one of the most human and readable books on the subject ever written. As the author frankly confesses in his preface, the book is not intended for philosophical experts, but for all those who are interested in the problems of practical philosophy and who are in need of a guide who may help them in solving the same, or if that should sound too presumptuous, of some one with whom to discuss them. The criticism that the treatment of fundamental principles is less searching and thorough and that the questions of the day (*Tagesfragen*) receive more attention than they deserve in a philosophical treatise, is therefore not at all pertinent. "I have not been able," says Paulsen, "to make up my mind to enter upon a more detailed discussion of principles, because I do not believe that great prolixity in these matters will do anyone much good. The philosophers, to be sure, have long ago worked out their own principles; to readers, however, who lay no claim to such a title the meaning and adequacy of the basal

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<sup>4</sup>The "System of Ethics" (not including the "Outline of the Theory of the State," etc.), the "Introduction to Philosophy," the "Kant," the "German Universities" and "German Education" have all been translated into English.

notions will be proved more easily by their fitness to explain particular cases and to solve concrete problems. I have been equally unwilling to ignore the questions which are moving our age; books which have nothing to say to their times, and therefore fill their pages with untimely logical quibbles or with endless historical-critical discussions, are plentiful enough as it is, and there has never been a dearth of tiresome books, so far, in Germany. There are books that are timeless because they are written for all times; but there are also timeless books which are written for no time. This book does not belong to the first class, and it does not wish to belong to the second." "Besides," he goes on to say, "I do not believe that a new system of moral philosophy is either necessary or possible; the great constructive principles have been already so thoroughly worked out by Greek philosophy as to be satisfactory, in the main, even to-day. To bring the old truth into living touch with the questions which occupy our age is, in my opinion, the most important function of modern ethics. . . . Perhaps there never has been so little disagreement concerning the problem and principles of moral philosophy since the days of Christian Wolff as exists at present." <sup>5</sup>

By the "old truth" Paulsen means the teleological conception of morality which governed the thinking of most philosophers from Aristotle down to the time of Kant, who brought about a reaction in favor of intuitionistic formalism, and which is again coming into its own, thanks to the influence of the modern biological theory. According to the teleological view acts are right or wrong according to their tendency to produce certain consequences. The standard of right and wrong is to be sought in the effects which acts naturally tend to produce. Kantian intuitionism which defined acts as good or bad in themselves, regardless of their effects, our author considers

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<sup>5</sup> "System of Ethics," English translation, Preface.

a survival of the individualistic and rationalistic mode of thought common to the eighteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

Paulsen would therefore agree with utilitarianism in the view that it is the effect of the act that ultimately makes it right or wrong. But he differs from the English school in his opposition to its hedonism; for him pleasure is not the end or purpose to be realized, pleasure is not the highest or absolute good; the goal is "welfare," "an objective content of life," "definite concrete activities," "the perfection of our being" or "the perfect exercise of life." For this theory he has coined the term *energism*, in order, as he says, to bring his view into sharp contrast with hedonism: the end of the will is not feeling but action. "Its resemblance to Aristotle's *ἐνέργεια* may also serve to remind us of the origin of the conception. The word *welfare*, finally, seems suited to designate the highest good in its twofold aspect; it shows, first, that the highest good is an objective content of life, consisting in the perfect exercise of all human psychical powers; then it also suggests that such a life is accompanied by pleasure, and hence that pleasure is not excluded from the perfect life, but included in it."<sup>7</sup> We must admit that this conception is purely formal, but it cannot be made more specific. "It is as impossible to define the perfect life as it is to define a plant or animal species. We can simply give a description of it; this it is the business of the doctrine of virtues and duties to do."<sup>8</sup>

Another point is emphasized by Paulsen in this connection, which is often overlooked by utilitarians. The end or purpose realized by morality is grounded in the human will, it is something upon which the will is essentially directed, something which is accepted as a good, indeed as the highest good. "The highest good for man,

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<sup>6</sup> See article on "Ethics" in "Systematische Philosophie" (Part I, Vol. VI, of *Kultur der Gegenwart*), p. 288.

<sup>7</sup> "System of Ethics," p. 224.

<sup>8</sup> "System of Ethics," p. 251.

that upon which his will is finally directed, is a complete human life; that is, a life that leads to the full development and exercise of all capacities and endowments, particularly the highest, the mental and moral capacities of the rational personality."<sup>9</sup> In this respect, it seems to me, the teleological theory approximates the Kantian conception: in the last analysis the good inheres in the very nature of the will; the human will is essentially a good will, and good is good because human willing makes it so.<sup>10</sup>

It may be said that we are here reasoning in a circle. This is true. The value of virtue is said to consist in its favorable effects upon the perfection of life (welfare), and then it is held that the value of life consists in the normal performance of all functions, or in the exercise of virtue. Virtue is first conceived as a means to welfare, and then it is conceived as an end in itself. This circle is regarded by Paulsen as inevitable. We are here confronted with a relation analogous to that which we find in organic life, where everything is also both a means and an end. "Heart and brains, hands and eyes, muscles and bones, are means of preserving bodily life; but they are at the same time parts of the body," and therefore partial ends in themselves. "So, too, in the moral sphere every excellence or virtue is an organ of the whole, and at the same time forms a part of life; it is therefore, like the whole, an end in itself."<sup>11</sup>

Accepting the view that all virtues are both means and ends in themselves, we have to remember that not all of them are so in the same degree. Just as some organs in the body are more important than others, some moral functions are of greater worth than others. That human life therefore will be the best which succeeds best in sub-

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<sup>9</sup> "Systematische Philosophie," p. 283.

<sup>10</sup> See my articles, "Intuitionism and Teleology" (*INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ETHICS*, July, 1902) and "Kant and Teleological Ethics" (*Kantstudien*, Vol. VIII, No. 1).

<sup>11</sup> "System of Ethics," p. 276.



ordinating the lower functions to the higher. "A perfect human life is a life in which the *mind* attains to free and full growth, in which the *spiritual forces* reach their highest perfection in *thought, imagination and action.*" Since, however, such a life is possible only in a historical human environment, we must include the *social virtues* in our scheme. And we may go on and say that although a perfect human life is an end in itself, it is at the same time a part and a means of a larger whole, of a national life, and finally of the life of humanity as a whole. Perfect humanity, then, or, in the Christian phrase, the kingdom of God on earth, would be the highest good and the final end to which all nations and all historical products are related as means, not as indifferent means, but as parts and organs of the end. We cannot, of course, give a concrete exposition of this ideal; all we can do is to outline it by means of the general concepts of the historical mental life which we know. It is still more difficult to give a concrete conception of the ideal when we insert the life of humanity, as we can do, into a greater and more comprehensive reality and call it a part of the universal life of the all-real. Here we are transcending the domain of knowledge; we merely indicate the direction in which we, as feeling and willing beings, are moving when we attempt to complete our conception of reality in this way. We are expressing our belief that all reality is tending to some highest end. Here we are thrown back upon the symbols of art and religion; the intellect cannot grasp the contents of this highest good.<sup>12</sup>

We have seen that the energistic theory finds the deepest root of morality in the human will. The objection is here urged: the good is not what we will to do, but what we *ought* to do. To do good means to do our duty, and our duty does not seem to coincide with the natural will. Can we solve this contradiction, or is the truly *moral*

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<sup>12</sup> "System of Ethics," pp. 277-283.

good absolutely different from the end or purpose of the natural will? The evolutionistic explanation of the sense of duty or conscience will, in Paulsen's opinion, help us to answer this question. We noticed before how the teleological theory approaches the Kantian view; we may observe now how it makes use of modern evolutionistic ethics. In conscience or the sense of duty the triple authority of parents, people and gods reveals itself; it is a feeling of obligation to a higher will which sets a limit to particular inclinations. This higher will is recognized by the individual will as having absolute right to command, as one which must under all circumstances be obeyed, even where it has not the power to compel. The sense of duty commands obedience to custom; customs are purposive modes of behavior conducive to the preservation of the social whole which creates them as well as to the normal development of the individuals of whom the whole consists. We may therefore say that duty commands nothing more than what the individual human will regards as good; indeed duty expresses the true will of the individual, his essential will, his universal will. The individual will and the social will tend on the whole to determine conduct in the same way; in the last analysis the will of the individual desires the life and welfare of the group. It is only in particular and isolated cases that he desires exceptions to be made in his favor.<sup>13</sup>

In a later account<sup>14</sup> Paulsen expresses the matter somewhat differently, in the language of Hegel, of which he was not particularly fond in his earlier days. What he formerly called the individual's basal or essential will he now speaks of as the *objective* will. The system of objective morality is regarded not as a product and function of the individual as such or of his "reason," but as the product and function of a universal reason immanent

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<sup>13</sup> "System of Ethics," pp. 340 ff.

<sup>14</sup> "Systematische Philosophie," pp. 289 ff.

in the social forms of historical life. The individual participates in the customs and morality of the social whole just as he participates in language and religion. We cannot explain morality without going to objective morality, which is expressed in the customs and laws, in the moral commands and judgments, conceptions and ideals of the race. Conscience is the knowledge on the part of the individual of objective morality and his inner relation to the same. Duty is the feeling of obligation to act in accordance with the demands of objective morality, without regard to accidental desires of the individual will. The function of objective morality is the regulation of intersubjective relations. The individual is nowhere left to his own choice and caprice in the solution of the problems of life; the path is marked out for him by custom and law. Morality has a social-teleological meaning. Social union and coöperation between willing beings are made possible only by general rules or norms which determine the conduct of all. Social action is possible only through the regulation of the voluntary action of each by uniform law.

This suggests to us the question of the freedom of the will. Psychological freedom, according to Paulsen, has never been denied; an act is called free when the will of the agent is its immediate cause. Metaphysical freedom, however, that is, the theory that the will or the particular decisions themselves have no cause, Paulsen rejects. It belongs to philosophizing theology or scholasticism; modern philosophy has not solved the problem: it has simply dropped it. No one really believes that the human will is an *ens a se*, or that, a certain nature and certain conditions being given, a certain stimulus will sometimes produce one act and sometimes another. Man is the product of the collective body from which he springs. But man is not molded mechanically by things and men; the outer as well as the inner man is formed by the reaction of an inner principle upon external influences, by which his nature is gradually developed.

But this inner principle, this character, this ego, or whatever we may choose to call it, is not itself absolutely uncaused, it does not enter the world as an absolutely isolated element. This ego, like the organized body, is the product of evolution.

Then is there no freedom of the will? Yes, there is, in this sense. Man determines his conduct by resolutions. Resolutions are the result of deliberation; in deliberation several possible courses of action or modes of behavior are compared with the ultimate aims of individual and social life, and the choice is made accordingly. Man then is not determined by his *impulses*, but he determines himself by *ideas of ends*. This faculty of regulating and determining the particular functions of life by an idea of one's life, by ends and ideals, by duty and conscience, is precisely what we mean by free will. In a certain way then man emancipates himself from the course of nature; he rises above nature and opposes it as a self, he determines it and employs it, is not determined by it: man becomes a *personality*. It is apparent that freedom in this sense is not an original endowment of human nature, but an acquired characteristic; it has been acquired by the entire race in the course of history, and must be acquired anew by each individual. Man can learn to fashion his outer and inner man with conscious purpose, according to his ideal; he can discipline his natural impulses, nay, even suppress them, so that they will no longer move him. It is to be understood, however, that the determining principle itself must be native to man; this he cannot give himself by his will, for it is the innermost will itself. Man does not exist before himself, choosing or determining his will by his will; that would be equivalent to Münchhausen's attempt to pull himself out of the mire by means of his own queue. Only a preëxisting fundamental will can determine the development of the empirical character in the course of life. In this sense Schopenhauer is right: the character does not change. But he is wrong when he says that a change

of the nature and the modes of action of the will is impossible. Whoever *desires* to change *can* do so; only the will must be in earnest, it must desire the means which lead to the end. Empty wishes will not avail.<sup>15</sup>

After this review of the fundamental principles of Paulsen's system, we are prepared to understand his conception of the nature of ethics and its relation to metaphysics. Actual morality, as it is expressed in the laws and customs of the social group, is on the whole adapted to the conditions of life, and is therefore rational. It is the business of ethics and jurisprudence to recognize this objective reason in law and custom and not first to introduce reason into life. Or we might say, it is the real problem of ethics to describe the contents of the "correct" conscience and to show the practical necessity of the same. Considered in its mere form, the subjective conviction of the agent constitutes the "good" conscience, and nothing further can be said on that point. But no system of ethics, not even that of Kant, has confined itself to a mere definition of the subjective form of right and wrong; if it had, it could have been written in a single sentence.<sup>16</sup>

A teleological ethics demands a teleological metaphysics for its completion. If the life of man, including his moral life, forms an inseparable part of universal life, then it must be possible to insert the theory of this life into a universal theory of reality. Aristotle declares that nature creates nothing without a purpose; this conception of his teleological philosophy of nature also forms the starting point of his ethics: the purpose of man may be inferred from his cosmic position. What distinguishes man from other creatures is reason, hence reason is the purpose of nature: in human reason absolute reason has created the organ which rethinks its cosmic thoughts.

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<sup>15</sup> "System of Ethics," pp. 452 ff.

<sup>16</sup> "Systematische Philosophie," pp. 282, 292, 299 ff; also Introduction to "System of Ethics."

This idea is likewise expressed by Hegel. Mental and moral life, and most of all, philosophy, is the end or purpose of evolution: the self-consciousness of the idea in thinking, the thinking of the thoughts which constitute reality, this is both the meaning and purpose of reality as such, as well as the end and highest good of human life.<sup>17</sup>

Ethics cannot rest in a materialistic philosophy; both ethics and metaphysics revolt against it. Ethics demands harmony with metaphysics because it cannot set up a purpose for man without assuming a purpose for reality as such; and conversely metaphysics demands harmony with ethics, because it cannot conceive a reality which consists of absolutely disparate beings, of unfeeling, unintelligent atoms, on the one hand, and of feeling, willing, valuating beings on the other, said to arise from the former. But these postulates are more than mere surmises or demands of faith without any theoretic basis, as Kant would have it. They are, rather, thoughts of which the facts lead us from both sides.

The objective idealism of Greek philosophy, which celebrated its resurrection in the speculative philosophy of the nineteenth century, is the necessary form of philosophy. The moral laws are natural laws of human life, natural laws in the sense that their observance leads to the preservation and perfection, their violation to the destruction, first of spiritual life, and finally also of physical life. In the moral will we have the profoundest and most essential expression of the nature of reality as such; reality conceived as a unity has the form of a holy will, in which the highest goods of life, even of our own life, have a reality that can never be lost. To be sure, we cannot adequately know this final unity of reality and goodness which we call God: we can only conceive it schematically. We cannot describe or exhaust the infinite content of this life; we can determine its nature in

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<sup>17</sup> "Systematische Philosophie," p. 309.

relation to ourselves only by means of symbolic expressions; hence a symbolic anthropomorphism is the necessary form of the human belief in God. Hence the belief that the real exists for the sake of the good is a belief grounded in the will, or, as Kant puts it, a postulate of practical reason rather than a theoretic knowledge.<sup>18</sup>

The principles outlined above formed the background of Paulsen's interpretation of human conduct and human institutions. Everywhere he sought the reason for things and endeavored to see them in their relations to larger wholes. The third and fourth books of his "System of Ethics," in which he discusses such subjects as self-control, bodily, economic and spiritual life, honor, justice, benevolence and veracity;<sup>19</sup> the family, sociability and friendship, property and property rights, society and the social order, socialism and social reform, the nature and origin of the state, forms of government, the function of the state and its limits, as well as his essays on ethics and politics, are full of practical wisdom. In the many contributions to educational literature made by him, he never lost sight of his ethical ideal, the highest good, and the high esteem and loving remembrance in which he is held by the teachers of Germany<sup>20</sup> show that his words have not fallen upon unwilling ears. Paulsen's profound knowledge of human nature and his sympathetic interest in all things human, his fine sense of discrimination and his penetrating insights, his genius for seeing things as they are and grasping their essential bearings, his intellectual honesty and healthy moral judgment, his good temper and rational self-control, these were the qualities which quickened his work with the spark of life and made his service valuable to his people. He was the child of a hardy, frugal, clear-headed and warm-hearted sea-

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<sup>18</sup> "Systematische Philosophie," pp. 308 ff.

<sup>19</sup> See also "Systematische Philosophie," pp. 305 ff.

<sup>20</sup> The new Realgymnasium at Steglitz has been named after him, and a movement has been set on foot by the gymnasial teachers of Germany to erect a suitable memorial to him.

faring race, and he gave philosophical expression to the ideals of a stock from which so many intellectual leaders of the old fatherland have sprung, and upon the integrity of which the future glory of Germany must depend.

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### THE LATE DR. EDWARD CAIRD.

J. S. MACKENZIE.

THE death of Dr. Caird removes a great figure from the philosophic world; how great, this is neither the time nor the place to inquire. The majority of readers have probably not quite an adequate appreciation of the importance of his work. The fact that his writings were very largely historical and expository in their form, has tended in some degree to conceal the originality of his thought. Careful students of philosophy are, however, well aware that such exposition as his is in reality a creative act, implying a more complete mastery and a more resolute forward movement of thought than most of what presents itself in the definite form of a fresh construction. It would be vain to attempt here any account or estimate of his contributions to philosophic literature. It may suffice to say that the present writer is probably not alone in thinking that he has built up a solid treasure-house of wisdom that will outlast many more showy erections. Some of his contemporaries may have surpassed him in subtle dialectic, in incisive criticism, in grasp of detail, in directness, definiteness and force of utterance; but in breadth of knowledge, balance of judgment, maturity of insight and power of luminous exposition, he was probably without a peer. One returns again and again to his writings, from works that may sometimes seem more brilliant, with a constantly recurring sense that no one has perhaps come so near as he to the pronouncement of the last word that the present state of